

Quarterly Job Progress Report
for the
Community-based Conservation Extension Specialist (CCES)

Period of
March-June 2001

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Activities and Accomplishments

Background

The Cooperative Agreement between Utah State University (USU) and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) that established the jointly funded position of Community-Based Conservation Extension Specialist (CCES) was signed on March 27, 2001. The two year agreement outlines activities that will be conducted by the CCES to address sage grouse conservation issues. As part of the agreement, the CCES will submit quarterly and an annual report of activities and accomplishments. Joel Flory was hired to fill the position. The report covers the period of March to June 2001.

Local Working Groups (LWG)

CCES cooperators believe that the formation of the LWG's across the state of Utah is the first step in conservation planning for sage grouse. To increase the efficiency, a standard process was agreed upon by which the groups would be formed. The first meeting is to be held with the County Extension agent, the local UDWR) biologists, the CCES and the USU Wildlife Extension Specialist. This meeting is to identify all the local stakeholders that would be interested in or affected by sage grouse issues. In addition, identification of land management agencies, conservation and recreational organizations, utility companies, and other interested publics were identified. After compiling this list, creation of a mailing list for each LWG occurs, and then letters are mailed for an initial informational meeting. For each new LWG, contact has been made with local legislators to make them aware of the intent of the conservation planning process and to keep them abreast of the progress. State and local politicians have endorsed the process and signed their names to the introductory letters. The informational meeting format will include a dinner with social interaction time, introduction to the process and purpose of the meeting. Presentations from the UDWR and USFWS will provide information on sage grouse biology and status in Utah, the petitioning process and timelines, and the status of petitions already received by the USFWS. Following this portion of the meeting, ample time will be allowed for questions and answers. Additional input is welcomed from those present on local issues and sage grouse observations. The group is then allowed to decide whether or not formation of a sage grouse LWG is desired. Subsequent meetings will then be scheduled to begin identifying and refining the issues, coming up with a mission statement, and ultimately determining goals and objectives for each issue identified to be incorporated into a local Sage Grouse Conservation Plan.

South-Central Valleys LWG

The establishment of the South-central Valley's LWG was initiated in May. Meetings were held with the Garfield/Kane Co. Extension Agent, the local DWR biologist and local land management agencies to determine the participants that would need to be invited to the initial informational meetings and coordinate mailings. The mailing list is to be maintained by the CCES and provided to the Extension agent who will distribute

the mailing. August 2nd was selected for the initial meeting. This meeting will include informational presentations from the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a question and answer session.

Box Elder County LWG

The establishment of the Box Elder LWG was initiated on June 18th. A meeting was held with the Box Elder Co. Extension agent, local DWR biologist, and land management agencies to identify interested stakeholders for the formation of the sage grouse LWG. The mailing list will be maintained by the CCES and distributed to the Extension Agent in order to mail meeting invitations. The initial meeting will be held on August 30th and will include a dutch oven dinner and informational presentations from the UDWR and USFWS. Additional time will be available for question and answers.

San Juan County Gunnison Sage Grouse LWG (SWOG)

A LWG meeting was held prior to the field season to discuss the status of conservation easements, funding opportunities and the upcoming field season. A future LWG meeting will be held following the field season to discuss the findings and plan for future research and habitat projects.

Parker Mountain LWG (PARM)

In early April we held a PARM LWG meeting to discuss the results from the 2000 field season and plan for the upcoming year. Several projects were discussed including a NASA grant to evaluate forage production and utilization from remote imagery, the ongoing habitat improvement projects, and the ongoing research to evaluate the effects of habitat manipulations on sage grouse habitat use.

Other Projects

In support of current sage grouse research efforts, the CCES assisted in trapping activities in both San Juan County and on Parker Mountain. On Parker Mountain we were able to trap 19 females in 3 days,

Contacts have been made with several adjacent states to discuss the status of conservation planning efforts in those states. The major emphasis has been to collect and review conservation plans in order to come up with a template format for conservation plans in Utah that can be used in writing the 13 conservation plans in a quicker, uniform manner ensuring that all issues are addressed and discussed at LWG meetings. To date, seven conservation plans on sage and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse have been collected and reviewed from Colorado and one statewide plan from Nevada.

I began to develop an Access database that will include all interested parties and be the basis for mailing letters of invitation to those who wish to participate in the conservation

planning process. The database currently contains PARM participants and those individuals and agencies initially identified for the South-Central Valley and Box Elder County LWG's. This will be an ongoing process.

Meeting facilitation training has been informal to date. I've received training manuals from UDWR planning manager Dana Dolsen, and discussed strategies for effective facilitation. On his recommendation, I've read "The Interaction Method of Meeting Facilitation". Natural resource meeting facilitation training has not been available, but should be in the near future.

In support of the LWG effort, I've been gathering data on land ownership in Box Elder County, created flyers and posters for advertising of LWG meetings, and made contact with local newspapers/newsletters to distribute meeting notices. Collection of current and historic information for each area has been ongoing. GIS information has been organized for each of the LWG's to assist in future planning efforts at the local level.

Several field trips were taken to the PARM and South-central Valley area to advise the USFWS on potential Utah prairie dog habitat improvement sites. Site-specific information was provided to address the potential impacts on sage grouse habitat. Portions of the PARM study area are also proposed sites for a Utah prairie dog mitigation bank.

On June 4th-7th, I attended the Sage Grouse Habitat Restoration Symposium held in Boise, Idaho. There were two days of scientific papers presented on all aspects of restoring and enhancing sagebrush rangelands in addition to a two-day field trip to view the results of previous habitat manipulations and view sage grouse habitat conditions. The information obtained at the symposium will be used to plan sage grouse habitat restoration efforts across Utah by the LWG's.